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WEBSTER
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WASHINGTON

A The Senate Intelligence Committee announced today it has scheduled a hearing for next Wednesday on the confirmation of William Webster as CIA director.

The current FBI chief is expected to be questioned on his involvement in the Iran arms-Contra aid scandal.

A committee spokeswoman said the hearing would begin at 10 a.m. EDT April 8, and that only one day of questioning is expected.

The chairman and vice chairman of the panel said Webster's apparent limited involvement in the Iran arms affair will be among the broad issues he will face, but they know of nothing at this point that would prevent him from being approved.

A "In saying he'll be asked about these questions, I want to make it clear ... I have no reason to believe at this point that his answers will not be satisfactory," said Chairman David Boren, D-Okla.

Asked if he knew of anything that would imperil the nomination, the senator replied, "I do not at this point."

Asked the same question Thursday, Vice Chairman William Cohen, R-Maine, said, "Who knows? But I'm not aware of anything."

A congressional source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, cautioned that Webster faces "a lot of hard questions" and that the panel will not be a "rubber stamp," but said he generally agreed the nomination looks safe heading into the hearing.

However, the source added, "I also thought that in the Gates' case."

A The committee held two days of hearings in February on the nomination of acting CIA Director Robert Gates to succeed the ailing William Casey as the nation's top spy. But Gates, who was Casey's deputy during part of the crisis, was seen as too close to the scandal and withdrew his nomination March 2.

President Reagan asked Gates to stay on as deputy director and then nominated Webster, a respected former federal judge praised for his reform and operation of the FBI since 1978.

Webster's nomination was seen widely as an administration attempt to free the appointment from the continuing turmoil that surrounds the sale of arms to Iran and the scheme to divert profits to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

But Intelligence Committee officials said Webster will face questioning about his actions in at least two aspects of the scandal:

-Agreeing in October to a request from Attorney General Edwin Meese for a delay in the FBI probe of Southern Air Transport Inc., a Miami air cargo firm once owned by the CIA and now linked to Contra supply efforts.

-Agreeing with Meese's decision in November not to bring the FBI into the Justice Department's initial inquiry of the Iran affair.

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Among the other matters Webster is expected to be asked about:

-Charges several years ago by members of a Senate committee that the FBI withheld information about allegations concerning former Labor Secretary Ray Donovan and organized crime. Donovan and his construction firm were indicted by a grand jury on charges of defrauding the New York transit authority in connection with construction of a subway tunnel. Donovan is now on trial.

-Criticism of the FBI for its Abscam operation in 1980, when undercover agents masqueraded as Arab sheiks offering to pay members of Congress for legislative favors. The undercover stings raised questions of entrapment though they were upheld in court.

-Allegations concerning the FBI probe of former U.S. District Judge Harry Claiborne, impeached last year and removed from office after being convicted on tax evasion charges. Claiborne claimed the FBI office in Las Vegas, Nev., had a vendetta against him for criticisms he had leveled at the agency.

-Charges by a one-time FBI informant that two agents broke into the Dallas church office of a group opposing the administration's policies in Central America. The FBI reportedly has found no evidence to support the allegation.